Play and manage your music with JuK 2.0

Local Jukebox Hero

Most media players have one major drawback, they fail to provide efficient playlist management functions. In JuK's case, this is one of its strongest points. We look at the new KDE 3.2 music maker.

BY DANIEL MOLKENTIN

Figure 1: Playlists on the left, and the current track on the right.

CDs are out – long live digital music! Admittedly, a music collection does need some maintenance, and the *kdemultimedia* package from KDE 3.2 provides a new tool that does exactly that, the JuK [1] audio player. It is easy to understand why it handles playlists so well. After all, its author, Scott Wheeler [2], originally designed it as a tool for managing tracks and metadata (title, artist, album, etc.) known as QTagger. The play function was added later. JuK supports MP3, Ogg Vorbis, and the Free Lossless Audio Codec, FLAC [3].

Draw the Line

When you first launch the program, all you get to see is an empty playlist on the left. This so-called *Collection list* is a permanent fixture, and contains all the tracks known to JuK. You can add your own playlists later (see Figure 1). If you do not need this feature, you might like to hide the area by dragging the **splitter** as far left as possible with your mouse.

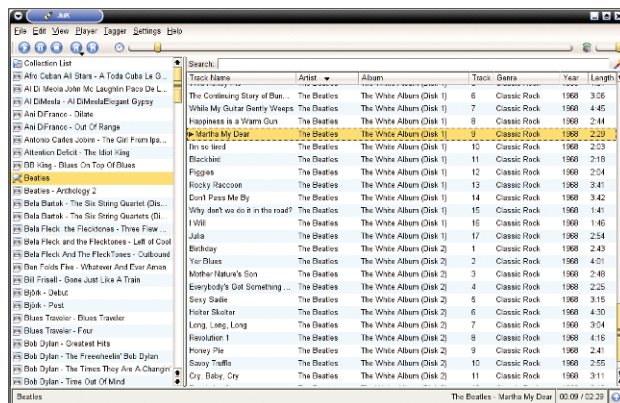The control elements for media playing are located in the toolbar, which can be positioned at the side or bottom of the window, as required. The status bar at the bottom of the window provides information on the playlist or the current track. Clicking on the arrow button will access the current title in the playlist. If you click on the playing time, JuK toggles the display to show the remaining time. Click again to switch back to normal viewing mode.

The central element of the interface is a playlist that is reminiscent of Apple's iTunes. You can right-click the column headings to specify what items to display in the playlist.

Management

To load tracks, you can select them individually by clicking on *File / Open* or tell JuK to load a complete folder, *File / Open folder*, whenever you launch the program. Each time you launch JuK, the program displays a full list of music files from this directory and its subdirectories, even the new additions.

If you have a large collection of data, it might take JuK a few seconds to collect the metadata for all the tracks the first time you access them. Fortunately, this will not stop you using the program in the meantime. Thanks to its intelligent caching feature, this operation will be a lot quicker the next time you launch JuK.

If JuK locates a *m3u* formatted list (possibly created using XMMS), it will display the list as a playlist. The drop-down menu provides the core playlist maintenance features. *New* allows you to create an empty playlist, or specify a folder with a playlist. You can drag & drop from the current list to other lists.

If you have a lot of playlists, you should enable the compact view *Right click / View modes / Compact*. Or, select the *Tree* view to sort your lists by album, artist, and genre. Each playlist, with the exception of the collection list, can be stored in *m3u* format by right clicking and selecting *Save as*.

Playful

The right-hand panel of the JuK window also has a few treats in store for users, for example, the *Search* field directly above the current playlist. This allows you to restrict the selection of tracks in the current playlist. Click on the button next to the input box to perform a more complex search with JuK. You might like to save the results as a dynamic playlist. Any titles that match your search criteria are automatically added to the list.

To select a track to play next, without interrupting the current track, right-click the track and select *Play next*. If you hold down the [Shift] key and select multiple tracks, the dropdown offers to create a static list with the selected tracks.

After defining the list, you can close the main window. The JuK icon disappears into the KDE panel and pops up a window to inform you of the next track. Right-clicking the icon restores the player to the foreground. ∎

GLOSSARY

Splitter: *A control element that separates two program areas. Click the splitter at a predefined point, typically a chequered box, and hold down the mouse button to drag the splitter. This provides more space for the program area that is more important to you, and downsizes or hides less important parts.*

INFO

[1] JuK: *http://developer.kde.org/~wheeler/juk.html*

[2] Scott Wheeler : "KDE Scripting with DCOP" Linux Magazine, Issue 36, November 2003, p46

[3] FLAC: *http://flac.sourceforge.net/*